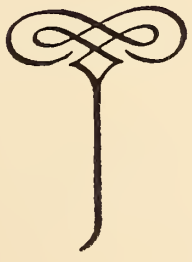
JEAN PARKE

ARTIST-POET-MYSTIC

AND HER

SEVEN CHRIST-DRAWINGS



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FIRST to make clear the artist's identity, Jean Parke is a woman, an American woman, in private life Mrs. Theodor Holm.

Her father, Goddard Parke, was of Scotch descent, with some Irish admixture. The son of a presbyterian minister, he was a lawyer and a judge while still in his youth, but had also a strong inclination towards art difficult to suppress. He died before Jean was one year old, at the age of twenty-nine.

Jean Parke was born in Minneapolis, and during her early childhood lived with her maternal grandparents at Waseca, Minnesota. Even thus early her sensitiveness to and extreme delight in beauty were strongly marked. Music, literature, art, and oratory seemed equally absorbing to her, to say nothing of many forms of craftsmanship, in wich she delighted and had an infinite capacity for painstaking.

When she was about four years of age, she went to Willmar, Minnesota, to live with her mother, who had remarried, and found great companionship in her stepfather, Major Dallas Hand (retired), whose great interest in the Orient, as a result of many years' residence in India, made a deep and lasting impression on her keen imagination. Major Hand died when she was about eight. From the schools at Willmar, Jean went to Boarding School at St. Mary's Hall, Faribault, Minnesota, graduating in two years. Her first year there was especially happy, and at the end of it she received the highest honors in English literature and oratory.

It was only thereafter that she definitely decided to take up art for her life work. She went to New York, going through the three years Fine Arts Course at Pratt Institute, Brooklin, in one year. For some time, commencing while she was still studying, she did covers, illustrations, and costume designs for the magazines.

Here she found much encouragement, but also much dissatisfaction and disappointment, and she came to the conclusion that America did not offer or inspire the ideals fundamental to serious creative art.

She cherished the idea that Europe might hold these inspirations, but at this time in her life the undertow of sorrow, paramount many times from earliest childhood,

swept her away from all endeavor, and she essayed to unite herself with the Church. The cloistered life offered much that was congenial to her nature, especially the opportunity for concentration, and even fresh encouragement to her as an artist. But the tenets of doctrine requisite to this life, fired her with protesting argument. Furthermore, she was physically unable to endure the accent of the convent teaching upon the sufferings of Jesus Christ as a never ending reality. Through some inborn tendency to sorrow, her health was literally shattered by this teaching, which she now knows to be a false and dangerous teaching for anyone, (though not to the same degree, perhaps), but which at the time she had not the grasp on metaphysics to refute.

Once more in the world, she attempted a new start. Forgoing the creative goal, she believed America offered more to the interpretive artist.

She entered the dramatic school of F. F. Mackay and completed his course in acting and oratory. At the end of this work, she found the theater interesting to herself only as a picture, and it was not very long before her extreme gift for portraiture became obvious, and she came to devote her entire time to this. Beginning about 1909 she made for publication a number of brilliant sketches of people prominent in the public eye. Her studies in black and white, done in pencil, were the first in this medium to become popular with the magazines in America. Oil she always considered, for her type of work, as too opaque and cumbersome, but she has to a considerable extent worked in watercolors, both transparent and tempora. Since her early success with pencil in portraiture she has retained a great love for the sensitiviness of its line, and has more recently continued this technique in color, even in treating her most serious subjects, as she feels that a greater transparency is obtainable by the use of sentient, meaningful lines than is possible in any solid tone-mass.

This work took her to Paris, the fulfillment of the early dream. By this time, however, so deeply had the need of spiritual succor wrought into her life that the longed for work of the old masters proved only a dissappointment. All of the technique in which she had reveled

as a child, before any question had come of its validity, and before which she had hoped to stand with bated breath, appeared as so much verbosity, garrulous over-articulation of inadequate themes. In the miles and miles of paintings, little light broke through as an answer to the aspirations of all her youth. One picture alone, and that not in Paris, but in the Tate Gallery, London, held balm. This was Watt's painting, The Inner Consciousness. Through many a disaster that followed, this picture seemed to stand on guard in her soul.

From the very beginning of awakened conciousness, the sensitiveness which was the basis of Jean Parke's inspiration, laid her open to intense suffering from any form of discord or pain in the life surrounding her; in fact, there began what seemed te be an unending struggle between the will to do, based on her sensitiveness to and delight in beauty, and a destructive melancholy, based upon her sensitiveness to and despair in human suffering. The result was an intense seeking for anything that would stabilize her objective life, permitting her to declare once and for all for one or the other, as the two standpoints are mutually antagonistic, — resulting in constant vacillation and destructive reactions. This quest centered chiefly in religion, although at that time her understanding of religion was so colored by mediaeval teaching as to consist in an acceptance of sorrow as a basic reality of life, with the vain hope of finding peace in the renunciation of those very concepts of beauty and joy which prompted her creative work. This despairing tendency for renunciation carried her to all lengths. But the pursuit of the religious life, as she found it, invariable terminated in a reaction against the illogic of the teachings in orthodox faiths, and she began to study the ancient intellectuals and their modern prototypes in the metaphysics of today; the works of the mystics were unavailable to her at this time, nor did she come upon the richness of their literary offerings, until after her own mystical experience.

This came about during an extreme and prolonged prostration of her health, by which all creative work was denied her. Thus deprived of such effort as had enabled her to bridge former chasms, and unable to

find the illumination she required in religious studies, (or at least unable to interpret them rightly through her latent slant upon the reality of sorrow and desirability of martyrdom,) she was driven to the uncovering of direct revelation within herself. This vision, when it came, was such a reversal of her previously accepted beliefs, such a contrast to what she thought she was seeking by fervent meditation, (which was, moreover, merely a prayer for complete resignation under affliction), as to consciously revolutionize her life and all its contacts. With every means of expression at her command she began to declare the glory that had been revealed to her as truth. This, together with her sensational healing, attracted wide public interest. Her first expression was a volume of poems, "Psalms of the Heart Restored", the publication of which received an instantaneous recognition by the spiritually-minded religious leaders, as well as by literary critics, so that it soon became necessary for her to make some definite plan by which she could meet her public ministry. She felt it impossible to indentify herself with any existing organization, nor could she be persuaded to establish a cult or organization of her own. She spent three years in preaching, healing and teaching in different churches and leagues of metaphysical study, owing to the great interest in New York among the clergy, physicians, and other awakened thinkers on the subject of spiritual healing. It was not, however, until the inspiration came for her series of Christ drawings, that her own medium of art was exalted once more as the direct and natural means to convey her message.

While delivering a lecture on Good Friday, 1922, she suddenly understood that she would be able to draw directly from an inner vision (in exactly the same technique as she had previously drawn from outer vision,) and present in graphic form, in a medium devoid of argument and dissention ideas which, while unifying in themselves, when rendered in *words*, so unfailingly create doubtful disputations. Through much contemplation upon different mediums of art she had realized that there is no such thing as a universal mode of expression — all must of necessity be relative — but she also suddenly perceived that there is one expression which all races and natio-

nalities can read aright, namely the expression of a countenance, and that whereas classical art aspired to presenting impersonal concepts in cold marble, — of wisdom, truth, dominion, etc. — it was the privelege and opportunity of Christian art, (if it were to progress from this point), to present the possibility of man himself conscious of these divine aspects. This was the hope of the Christian religion, as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. To be sure, such was by no means the direction taken by Christian art, floundering as it did in a morass of personal and vicarious salvation, and apparently centering with one accord upon the presentation and perpetuation of the human sufferings of Jesus. While it may have been necessery, in those ages of thick insensibility and brutality, for the Church to play upon pity in the human heart, in order to prepare even the slightest receptivity to the spiritual ideal, she believed the time had come to seek a more excellent way. This project readily reclaimed her old natural medium of graphic art, with its two cardinal points of fitness: first, the ability to convey the consciousness of her subject in her drawing, and second, the later discovered ability to work from an inner image, as others would use a model.

She approached the transcendent consciousness of Dominion in a series of studies of the face of Jesus in the different aspects of power in which He performed His mighty works — in other words, in His miracle-performing consciousness. The final drawing is an apothesis of all these aspects.

Immediately upon their completion these pictures were exhibited at the Anderson Galleries, New York. Their newness met with extreme interest. At subsequent exhibitions in orthodox churches the point was constantly recognized and emphasized that these simple drawings were the first exhibition in Christian churches, (founded as they are upon the miracles of Jesus,) that purpose to present the Master in His consiousness of Dominion, rather than in His human martyrdom.

"AFTERWORD" REPRINTED FROM "THE IMMACULATE PERCEPTION"

BY JEAN PARKE

Published by Harold Vinal, New York.

With the exhibition in art galleries and churches of the drawing, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and the six studies of the "Christ in Jesus," the questions as to their conception and execution have become both manifold and insistent, and many public lectures have been given for the answering thereof.

As compared with the public inquiry provoked by the publication of "Psalms of the Heart Restored," these interrogations are far simpler to answer, and may be summed up as follows:

First, it is important to emphasize that the appearance of the face of Christ within the Holy of Holies of vision, came after the rending of the veil, not before, being identical with a new sense of His companionship in the application of spiritual perception at a given point, rather than being the means (through steadfast contemplation) of rending the veil, as was the case with early Christian mystics.*)

Many a vocational religious, aside from Juliana and those conspicuous through the persistence of their ecstatic testimonies, has been led by the ideal of all-enduring love in the face of Jesus Christ, past the sense of sacrifice and martyrdom, into the full radiance of the mystical experience.

This was not the order of revelation for me. Darkness unto blindness on all planes preceded this rending. No image remained to beckon me, as either a symbol or a solace. Imagery was not.

For me was the earth without form and void. Sight, my original grace, was shut off by the fog of intellectual confusion, emanating from a stealthy false perception, and returned not until the entire chaos was withdrawn from the face of the deep.

The sublime radiance in the face of Jesus Christ was

*) Saint Paul was, I believe, led by the glory in the face of Stephen (transcending all martyrdom in his moment of trangfiguration), to the sensitive receptivity for his own world conquering vision.

Sadhu Sundar Singh is probably the most conspicuous modern example of cosmic consciousness, thus approached.

the prophecy of this sight restored; but three years elapsed after this vision before the project of employing my natural and original gift in graphic art as a medium for sharing this conception dawned upon me, — three years of intensive re-education.

The only answer I can find for this delay is that the entire range of the intellect required to be re-taught from the standpoint of spiritual apprehension, and that until this was accomplished, esthetic perception remained shrouded. ("And a cloud received him out of their sight.")

But when this ground was covered, indeed the moment the gamut was run, the esthetic perception was found ready and waiting. ("They also serve who only stand and wait.")

To be sure, the same light lights the senses as lights the reason, but the work of correction was necessary only in the field of reason, and these three years of field service were so absorbing as to postpone automatically all creative freedom and spontaneity.

The arrival at the purpose of drawing directly from inner vision, quite as one would from the objective model, came about through two natural discoveries; first, through long study of comparative forms of art, that the one and only expression understandable to all races alike, being without convention or school, is the expression in a countenance; and second, through studies in successful portraiture without the sitter, that logically I must be drawing from an inner image.

From these two conclusions it was an easy step to the realization that it would be possible to draw from that shining countenance of Christ which had become so steadfast that I might work therefrom directly as from outer vision. That this was a degree of subjectivity attained by many artists in their maturity and arrived at by natural and gradual intensification of their sight, I did not know at the time, but since then literature on the subject has constantly fallen into my hands.

The logical approach to delineating the expression of consummate comfort seemed to me, however, to begin a set of studies in consciousness, records of realization in the face of Jesus at moments of high accomplishments, such highly accomplishing realizations as could stop the

mob that would stone the Magdalene as well as heal her tortured mind, raise prostrate hope, illuminate the sad disciples, and pour oil upon the waves of human conflict.

Many of these studies were made before I recognized them as worth offering in themselves. Of the number I chose six to keep as a record of approach to the shining serenity, the majestic calm of the final conception.

The doing of the last drawing had none of the struggle or conscious concentration of the studies; it seemed to draw itself or sing itself rather, as the rotary line, continuing in its swing, gave the impression of a song sung in complete familiarity. In fact, the effort, as a whole gave me the sensation of a happy copyist, who without the slightest taking thought, merely transcribes or even traces from a finished plate its every technical detail.

Whether the many earnest studies made previously had antyhing to do with clarifying the technical problems of the central lighting in the finished picture, or whether the three years of constantly contemplating the centrally lighted vision itself dissolved these problems and produced an obedient and unconscious technique, remains still an open question.

In offering these drawings for public view there was no desire to present a likeness of Jesus other than that supplied by my own imagination (through the sacredness of early associated ideas), or to challenge the authority of types presented by other artists. Nor had I any intention to displace or impair the sanctity of traditions vital to those whose devotions centre upon long tried and established presentations in art.

The purpose was merely to offer, as evidence of things unseen, without resorting to symbolism, the direct expression (in his countenance) of Jesus' positive consciousness, terming it "The Christ in Jesus," or man conscious of God.

That this idea has met with such general understanding is cause for deep gratitude.

As to the coming of the conception itself, it is clearly a natural outcome of constant concentration upon the divine nature to perceive this nature realized in man's consciousness, and this realization as the light of his countenance. Such has surely ever been the order of transition from pagan to Christian sensibility, which order,

if reflected in art, should have carried the race from symbolic deification (in the cold grandeur of marble) of separate aspects of the Absolute, over to the living presentment of man himself as conscious of these aspects of the Absolute, individually and collectively — as fully capable of realizing and experiencing the divine nature in its entirety.

For this certainly was the hope made manifest in the presence of Jesus and the ideal of Christian Faith. *)

Strange, indeed, that these simple drawings should present such a departure in Christian churches (founded as they are upon the miracles of Jesus), which departure consists in their having as a purpose the conveying of his miracle-performing consciousness instead of his distress under persecution and martyrdom.

After the impersonal austerity of religious concepts in pagan art, Christian thought "tripped" upon the idea of the personal saviour, and thereafter sank in a morass of agonizing sentimentality and elaboration of vicarious atonement.

The supreme unity of realization, necessary as preparation for the sublime conception, was missed in the art life of race experience, so that here man was found wanting, and remained conditioned on this point.

Through some one all-satisfying, spiritual conception, whose blazing whiteness of intensity, as by some super-subtle welding, fuses forever as one what before was divergent (or gods many), the immaculate conception dawns, — the idea of the divine nature fulfilled in man's consciousness. Here man's vision of God is lost in God's vision of man. Transcendence immanent.

This dawning in the race of the immaculate conception is but a reflection slowly evolving from the blazing sight in the Godhead of man in perfection, recorded in such prophetic words as "Let us make man in our own image," and recognized as fully possible by Jesus in his imperative, "Be *ye* perfect even as your Father in heaven *is* perfect."

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*) That this was not the direction taken by Christian art can only be included as a part of that extreme misinterpretation and caricature through which the pure and impersonal dynamics of Jesus passed during those seething centuries following his brief but sublime conversation among men.

Pity was, perhaps, the only means of undermining the insensate cruelty of those brutal times, and making way for even a faint gleam of spiritual perception, so that the church made every appeal possible through art to evoke human pity for the Master and his followers.

The image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.
- Col. I, 15.

Vision of the universal Christ consciousness, first seen January 27, 1919, the project of attempting to convey the vision graphically, conceived on Good Friday, 1922, completed August, 1922.

Wherefore I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.
- Acts XXVI, 19.

For God who commanded the lights to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. - II Cor. IV, 6.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord. - II Cor. III, 18.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake in thy likeness. - Ps. XVII, 15.

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1. RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT.
   He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone.
   - John. VIII, 7.
2. LOVE.
   Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest. - John IV, 35.
3. LIFE.
   And I know that this commandment is everlasting life.
   - John XII, 50.
4. TRUTH.
   Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
   - John VIII, 32.
5. PEACE.
   Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.
   - John XIV, 27.
6. JOY.
   Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.
   - John XVI, 22.
7. THE CHRIST.
   Christ in you, the hope of glory. - Col. I, 27.

   We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; and every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. - I John III, 2-3.

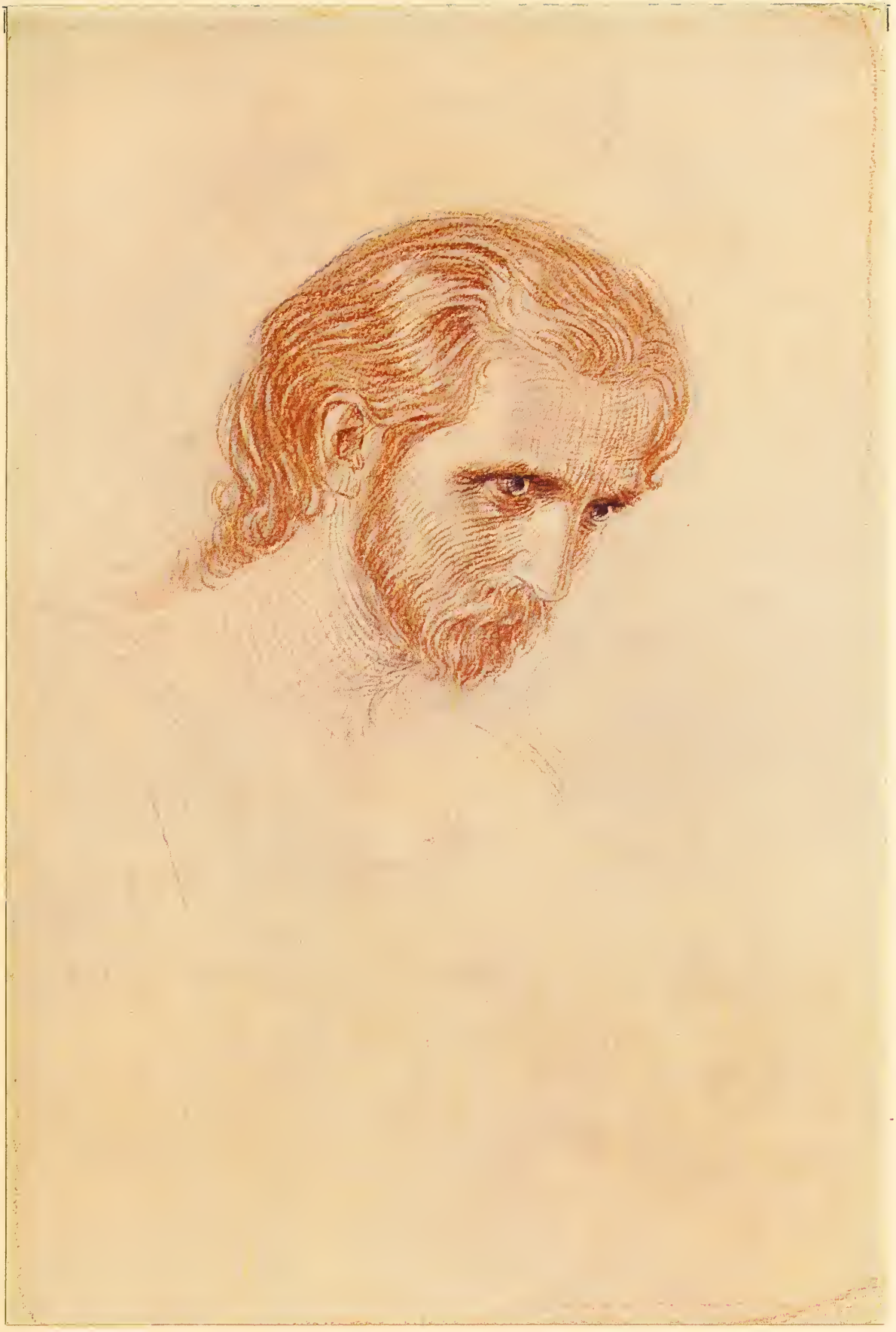
1. *RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT.*

[illegible]

In these paintings the eyes are [illegible];
They are studies of "eyes" — as "lamps", expressing
the man.

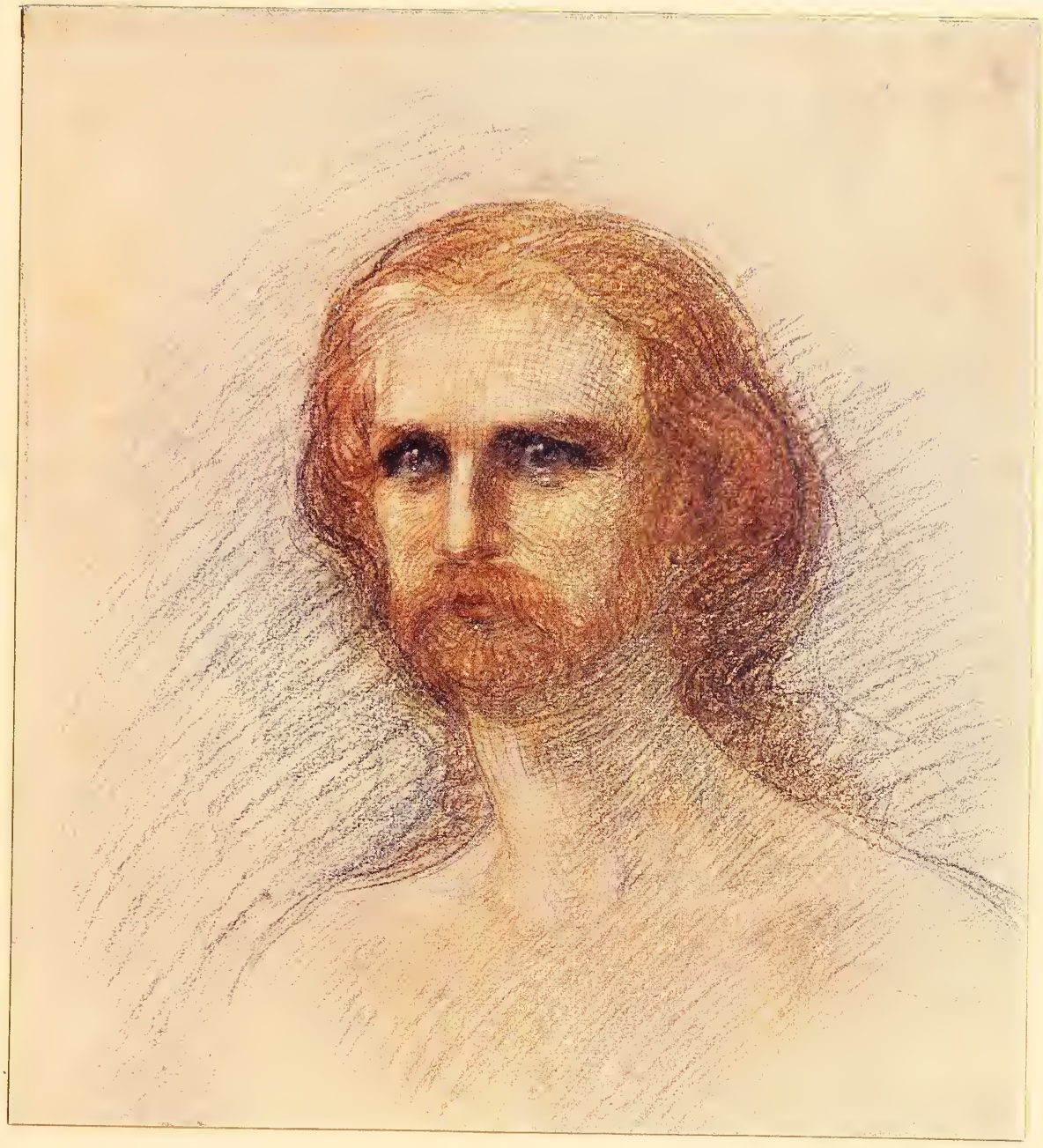
2. LOVE.

3. LIFE.



4. *TRUTH.*

5. PEACE.



6. *JOY.*

7. THE CHRIST.